

NEWSLETTER 5

CABIN FEVER



Daniel's elucidating article below about Corona Virus reminded me of a similar plague that befell our little country back in the 1800s. Sir Maui Pomare (who was educated at CBHS and Te Aute College) was one of the first Maori to train as a medical missionary, graduating from the Seventh-day Adventist College in Battle Creek, Michigan in 1899. During his time in the United States a newspaper report described him as "A sturdily built, sunny faced young man bubbling all over with wit and good nature". In March 1901 he was appointed by the NZ Government Maori Health Officer. He became an outstanding orator and was one of the first Maori in Parliament and also a Minister in William Massey's Cabinet, awarding him the CMG in 1920 and KBE in 1922. (He married Mildred Johnson from the East Coast of the North Island, about where Rocket Lab is now sited. She was also half Maori and her father was a wealthy European farmer). Maui spent many years working with iwi to regain land that had been taken from them, and when he became Minister of Health in 1923 he worked hard to lower the level of infant and maternal mortality. At that time our little country was besieged by tuberculosis and he quickly realised that the Maori custom of having an open casket on the Marae for a tangi could transmit the deadly disease to a wide and receptive population. So before he passed away in 1930 he decreed that his body was to be cremated and that he did not want to lie in state in an open coffin.

I came into contact with his son, also named Maui (the Sun God) back in 1972 when I returned from my OE and took up a job writing assignments for the Trades Certificate in Horticulture at the NZ Technical Correspondence School. Maui was teaching agriculture in the same faculty. Even then he was a big man, in every sense of the word and what I enjoyed about him was the old Rover car he drove, with a walking stick on the back ledge and a sheepdog in the boot. (I later married someone like that!) He invited me and my current flat mate to come and take up residence in his father's beautiful old home *Hiwiroa* on the Western Hutt hills overlooking the harbour. It had been built in 1911 in the grand European style with big verandahs, a tennis court and croquet lawn, with rhododendrons and other native forest out back. His wife had put little vases of daisies in the two bedrooms Kerry and I would occupy. But what intrigued us the most was a beautiful maori pa just inside the front door with magnificent carvings, artifacts and also special gifts this former Minister of the Crown had been given – like an armadillo. He told us he didn't want all the cousins moving in.... While Kerry and I greatly appreciated his offer, we felt we would get spooked not only by the overgrown shrubbery all round, but also by the spirits – so we reluctantly declined.

A couple of other interesting characters who had washed up at the NZTCI were Bill Smith, the former WWII Hero who had ridden a mini submarine into Singapore Harbour, and Denis Glover, the poet who lived in a perpetual alcoholic fog, by then. I resigned from the NZTCI 6 months later to take up work with Radio NZ Rurals, but Maui and I met by chance about 35 years later at the airport at New Plymouth. He was involved in representing Maori over the Taranaki offshore oil fields, and he was really following on the work his father had done to reverse injustices over land confiscation by the Crown. So we had a good korero and I was sorry to hear later that he had passed away.


I also had a distant link with the descendants of another early politician – Sir John Hall, when my Dad bought a farm at Hororata in Canterbury which had a lovely English garden. The house was built of rammed earth by Sir John's daughter Margo and her husband. We all know of Sir John for his support of the Women's Suffrage Petition and the way he rolled it out in Parliament just over a century ago. Our house was prosaically called "*The Mud Hut*", Hororata. Sir John's granddaughter Virginia was the same year as me at boarding school and her parents still lived in the big old wooden mansion he had built. It was also crammed full of precious gifts he had been awarded during his time in Parliament. (We grew magnificent violets over the septic tank and I used to take big bunches of them to the convent at Darfield where I learnt piano....)

Anyway enough of these reminiscences. We think it is high time our readers, if we still have any.... now take the opportunity to contribute items for our little newsletter. We would love to hear from you with your rich veins of experiences and the people you have known.! Thank you.

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Contributions/Suggestions/Ideas

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In a Lighter Vein


Venison for dinner again? Oh deer!

How does Moses make tea? Hebrews it.

England has no kidney bank, but it does have a Liverpool.

I tried to catch some fog, but I mist.

They told me I had type-A blood, but it was a Typo.

Thank Brian as you grin/groan. It is a punishing time! 

A Short History of a Shipping Container

20 foot equivalent unit*

it is quite normal these days to see a twenty or forty foot shipping container on the back of a truck or train heading to or from bluff or heading to the container terminal at port Chalmers. it is also normal now to see builders and other tradesmen using them for storage and they are even used as accommodation and various other uses.

So how and when did this revolution come about?

When I went away to sea as a young 16 year old in 1963 cargo vessels trading around the world carried their goods in a mainly "break bulk" mode. cartons, boxes, bags, and crates were manually put on pallets, nets or other forms of lifting gear to crane to or from the vessel. there were four main problems with this form of cargo handling:

1. Speed of loading/discharge
2. Manpower large gangs of Watersiders relating to cost
3. Damage to cargo
4. Pilfering

Ships would be in port for days during their cargo operations and a ship not moving is a ship not making money. One could write a book on troubles on the waterfront due to work related problems between employers and unions. An amusing example, from that time, is of Australian watersiders demanding "embarrassment money" for discharging toilet units! No doubt flushed with embarrassment.

A lot of cargo was damaged during the operation due to the handling.

The stealing of cargo by various parties was endemic. The only thing of value I remember that was not touched was "royal mail".

Believe it or not the first container shipment took place in 1956 when an American trucking entrepreneur, called Malcolm Mclean, (no doubt of scottish heritage) carried 58 trailer vans, later called containers, on a ship the "Ideal X" from Newark to Houston. Thus began the slow change from conventional shipping to container shipping.

There was much resistance at first with the cost of initially converting ships and building new container ships or "box" boats as they were called. There was of course the requirements of containers and wharf cranes and all the ancillary gear. Of course unions were also against progress for obvious reasons.

In 1966 1% of countries had container cranes and by the 1980's 90%.

The largest container ship to date can carry almost 24,000 teu* a slight increase on the 58 carried in 1956. next time you are stuck at the railway crossing watching a train with containers on board you will be able to relate the short history to your passengers.

John Henderson

Viral Reflections

Believe it or not but we are all looking forward to being very PC and quite soon hopefully.

Yes - to be "Post Covid" and amen to that.

In another life I spent 20 years sterilising things. This meant that I was forced to understand life and death in a bit more depth than usual.

At street level life and death are straightforward concepts but subject to change. Some reading this may have been technically dead, and maybe more than once, by old definitions. Back in the day stopping breathing was all it took. Now it involves permanent lack of brain function. And no, I am not morbidly obsessed with death. My specialty required me to understand it in more detail that's all.

Viruses, like Covid 19, are not living in any normal understanding of this word and yet they infect us and some cause disease. They do so by high jacking our cellular processes to produce millions of copies of themselves. Cells rupture, as a result, and on the destruction goes to other cells resulting in disease and worse in some cases.

Our immune systems, our personal thin blue line if you like, normally protects us from invaders. These may be living, like bacteria, or not, like viruses and prions – see google.

By definition if something is not living then it cannot die and this can be an issue with viruses and prions when you are sterilising fluids or instruments for use inside patients. Likewise our immune systems can struggle to deal with them, as well, sometimes resulting in disease as we are all too aware.

Physically altering the shape of viruses or prions removes their ability to cause disease and sterilising processes are designed to do this. Prions, in particular, can be a real challenge.

Our immune systems, like our police force, are often playing catchup. When faced with something novel, or new, they take time to respond. That is where we are right now but close to winning we hope.

Our immune systems are unique to us, as individuals, and they respond to challenges in their own way as well. Some of us show no symptoms of disease, while carrying a virus, and others become ill in the same situation. You will know some people who never seem to get colds or flu while others pick up everything going. While a very effective immune system is what we would all want sometimes they can become too efficient and turn on the body they are there to protect. Autoimmune diseases are the result.

Response to challenges, at various levels, is key to what we are going through. First our immune responses as individuals. Then in turn our responses, as citizens, to those around us. Thirdly to our community and then on up to our society at large. While our immune response is involuntary from there many factors come into play. As a sporting nation most of us have a keen sense of what it means to be a team player with an innate sense of fairness.

In reading around, before I wrote this, I found that Margaret Thatcher, in the 1980's had something to say about this that is relevant but quite wrong in my view:

"There is no such thing as society: there are individual men and women, and there are families."

Had the Iron Lady lived to see what is being achieved by "team play" in 2020 she may have reconsidered that point of view. Further the different styles of leadership on display as each country deals with this global pandemic is of interest to some of us.

I am so proud to live in New Zealand and to have Jacinda Adern as our leader.

"Let us do this together" using clear and eloquent supporting reasons along with encouragement is, in my view, very effective. It appeals to our sense of team play, fairness and humanity. Top marks.

Daniel Phillips

